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SUBJECT: COMOROS SANCTIONS UNDERWAY, BACAR NOT BACKING DOWN

REF: ANTANANARIVO 1114

¶1. (U) African Union (AU) sanctions, including a travel ban and the freezing of assets, against 145 persons on the island of Anjouan (ref) are underway in the Union of the Comoros. With contradicting dates in media reports, the AU confirmed sanctions started on October 20 and will run out 45 days later - on November 25. An AU naval blockade of Anjouan is in place to enforce sanctions, and the Chief of the Union Army says things are going "so far, so good." However, Comoran officials report at least two ships -- traveling between Anjouan and Tanzania and Anjouan and French-administered Mayotte -- have ignored the requirement to stop at other Comoran ports for inspection. Tanzanian authorities held one ship in Dar es Salaam after being notified by the Comoros' sanctions enforcement committee. AU Special Envoy Francisco Madeira went to Mayotte with other officials November 6 to reinforce the implementation of sanctions with Mayotte authorities.

¶2. (SBU) Tension -- and paranoia -- are running high in the Comoros. The Director of Comores Telecom in Anjouan was arrested November 7 under suspicion of "sabotage" (a charge Post finds unlikely) after a broken antenna disrupted landline and cellular telecommunication, putting Anjouan at a strategic disadvantage in the standoff. It is unknown whether he has been released, but communication lines are still down in Anjouan. Moroni is abuzz with the rumor that some of the men under Colonel Bacar's control may try to defect to join the AU patrol boats off the coast. Rumors continue that Bacar may place spies among the "defectors." Citizens of Grande Comore have expressed concern on television programs that the sanctions may inadvertently assist the separatists in dividing the islands and isolating the residents of Anjouan.

¶3. (SBU) COMMENT: The AU is proceeding under President Sambi's promise that his forces will not attack Anjouan before the end of the 45-day sanctions period. Bacar's time is quickly running out, with no sign he will consider backing down. An Embassy officer will travel to Moroni on November 14 to provide further first-hand reporting. END COMMENT.
MARQUARDT